

Possible causes of high bills

1. Using more energy or water

You may be using more energy or water due to a change in the way you do things, or for reasons such as:

Unusual or extreme weather

When the weather is extremely hot or cold you may use more energy or water than usual. For example, running a heater or an airconditioner throughout the day and overnight can contribute to a high bill.

Larger household

Additional housemates or guests can cause a noticeable increase in consumption. A new baby in the household can have a great impact on your usage, as often this means more people are at home during the day, they are awake for longer and there is more washing.

Adding or replacing appliances

If you have replaced or installed new appliances (especially large items such as an airconditioner or hot water system) you may notice an increase in your bills.

Appliances with timers or standby

Appliances which operate on timers or thermostat controls (eg heater, airconditioner, swimming pool filter or pump, bar fridge) continue to use energy even when you're not using them.

Some appliances have a standby option which allows them to be turned on or off by remote control (eg VCR, television, DVD, stereo). If the appliance is left on standby, it will continue to use electricity unless it is switched off at the powerpoint.

When you go on holidays, appliances that are left on (eg security systems) continue to consume energy.

Faulty appliances or hot water systems

Faulty or inefficient appliances and hot water systems can cause a significant increase. If you are:

- living in rental accommodation, contact your landlord or property manager immediately to report a fault
- a public housing tenant, call Housing NSW on 131 571 (24 hours, 7 days) to report a problem
- having problems with your landlord, contact the Consumer, Trader & Tenancy Tribunal on 1300 135 399.

2. Moving into a new property

When you move into a new home the energy and water bills may be different, even if all your appliances are the same. To make sure you haven't been billed for what the previous residents used, check the start date on your bill against the date you moved in. If you think there is a problem, contact the company as soon as possible.



Tips for resolving complaints

1. If you have any problems with your energy or water company, contact them first and explain your situation. Keep records of letters, names, times and dates.
2. If the call centre staff can't help you, ask to speak to a supervisor.
3. If the problem is not fixed, contact EWON by phone, fax, email, letter or visit www.ewon.com.au to make an online complaint.

About EWON

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) provides an independent way of resolving customer complaints about all electricity and gas suppliers in New South Wales and some water suppliers. Our service is free, fair and independent. Our aim is to keep essential services within reach of everyone.

Contact EWON

FREECALL	1800 246 545* Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm
FREEFAX	1800 812 291
FREEPOST	Reply Paid K1343 Haymarket NSW 1239
INTERPRETER	131 450
TTY/VOICE	133 677
EMAIL	omb@ewon.com.au
WEBSITE	www.ewon.com.au

*Calls from mobile phones may attract a fee, which will vary depending on your service provider. If you are calling from a mobile phone, let us know and EWON will call you back.

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A few tips

- Let the company know if you're moving and where to send your final bill, so you know how much you owe.
- Contact the company immediately if you are not receiving regular bills or have any questions about the fees and charges on your bills.
- Take a meter reading when you move in or out of a property, to make sure you only pay for what you use. If you live in a share house, keep track of when people move in/out.
- Avoid estimated bills by making sure the company has access to the meter or by doing 'self readings'.
- Organise for leaks to be repaired as soon as possible.
- Ask your energy company about 'off-peak' rates for hot water systems.
- If you have a smart meter, run appliances such as a dishwasher or pool pump during off-peak or shoulder periods.
- Research the efficiency of appliances before you buy. For tests and ratings visit www.choice.com.au or call the Australian Consumers' Association on 1800 069 552.

*Possible causes of high bills
(continued)*

3. Billing issues

Arrears and other charges

Bills can include charges other than usage, such as arrears from previous bills, fees, security deposits and miscellaneous charges. You can also receive a bill for outstanding arrears from your previous addresses, if these accounts were not finalised when you moved out.

Backbilling or delayed billing

There can be delays in the billing process and you might get a bill for a longer period than usual.

Change in tariff

Tariff increases usually come into effect after 1st July and can significantly affect your bill.

Catch-up billing

Your previous bills may have been low because the company under read or incorrectly read your meter, or they made a mistake when calculating your bill. Also, if the company was not able to access your meter (due to a locked box or gate, dogs or other obstructions), they will estimate your consumption. This means they may under or over estimate what you have used. Once the company finds an error or an accurate reading is taken, you may be sent a catch-up bill.

4. Leaks

There may be a gas or water leak on your side of the meter, which means you are liable for any excess usage.

Call the company for advice as soon as you can – emergency numbers are listed on bills or in the front section of the telephone book.

Arrange repairs with a tradesperson or if you are a tenant, contact your landlord as soon as possible.

Can I dispute a high bill?

Yes. Contact the company, tell them your concerns and ask them to explain why the bill is high. If they can't explain the bill to you straight away they may offer (or you can ask them) to do a full investigation.

Not satisfied with the result?

Call EWON for help. We can conduct our own investigation into the accuracy of your bill. If we find a mistake, you will only have to pay for what you have used.

If we don't find anything wrong, we will explain how we reached our decision and if you wish, we can try to negotiate a payment plan with the company so you can pay the bill over time.

Keep making payments

Investigations may take time, so try to pay the part of the bill not in dispute (eg pay what you would normally pay). This will help you stay on top of your bills and show the company you are acting in good faith. For example, if your bill is usually \$180 and the high bill is \$250, then you could pay \$180 while the company or EWON conducts an investigation.

Ask the company about payment options

Most energy and water companies offer payment plans and by law, they must have customer assistance programs to help people having difficulty paying their bills. Most companies also offer Centrepay to Centrelink customers, which means they can pay a regular amount towards their bill every fortnight.

If you are in financial difficulty due to an emergency or crisis situation you may be eligible for EAPA (Energy Accounts Payment Assistance) or PAS (Payment Assistance Scheme for water) vouchers.

Talk to the company about getting more time to pay your bill, a payment plan or where to get emergency help.

Saving money on your bills

A few tips to avoid high bills:

- Ask the company if they can provide you with energy or water saving advice.
- Ask if you can switch to 'offpeak' hot water rates.
- Choose energy and water efficient appliances.
- Avoid buying an appliance just because of its price, some of the cheaper appliances (eg oil column heaters) can be expensive to run.
- Make sure the thermostats on your appliances are working properly.
- Check the seals on your fridges.
- Get rid of a spare fridge or turn it off when it's not in use.
- Install wall and ceiling insulation.
- Use curtains to insulate your home and door strips to stop drafts.
- Keep airconditioner use to a minimum and use the recommended settings.
- Keep the cool or warm air in by closing your doors and windows .
- Use compact fluorescent or energy saving light globes.
- Take shorter showers and use efficient showerheads.
- Use the washing machine or dryer only when you have enough for a full load.
- Check your hot water system is working properly and isn't leaking.

More information on energy and water saving

Visit the NABERS website at www.nabers.com.au to rate the energy and water efficiency of your home.

For information on energy and water saving, visit www.energysmart.com.au

For information on NABERS or Energy Smart phone 1300 361 967.